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End of Humanity? Relatable!

Complete control of the entire world is humanity's goal. Skyscrapers reach into the heavens and roads entrap entire continents under their net. In the future, it seems clear that this control will only be strengthened. However, what this assumption is false. Ray Bradbury proves this in his pieces "The Pedestrian" and "August 2026: There Come Soft Rain". Bradbury was a sci-fi novelist in the mid-20th century who authored many stories focusing on dystopian society. "The Pedestrian" and "August 2026" are two such pieces. These two short stories challenge what it is to be human head-on. Dystopia is a focus in the passages; the worlds have been left behind. Bradbury uses dystopia to demonstrate the theme of humanity's ephemeral grip on the world; however, these two pieces do not demonstrate this equally. "The Pedestrian" was more effective at presenting a dystopian future where humanity has weak control of the world than "August 2026" because of its use of human characters, anti-human tone, and connections to problems in current society.

The relatability of Bradbury's human characters in "The Pedestrian" more effectively presents how humanity has an ephemeral grip on the world than the lack of human characters in "August 2026". The reader is human, so he/she is more likely to emphasize with the human character in "The Pedestrian" than the inhuman characters in "August 2026". Mr. Mead "could imagine himself upon the center of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert" (1). Here,

Bradbury characterizes Mr. Mead as an imaginative man, imagination being a fundamental human trait. Mr. Mead also demonstrates his feeling of loneliness. He walks the streets every night looking for other humans, because of his solitude. Being lonely is a common human attribute that everyone can relate to. By giving these and other human characteristics to Mr. Mead, Bradbury makes Mr. Mead more relatable to the reader. This relatability of the main character in "The Pedestrian" allows for the story to more effectively present the theme of humanities' weakening control of the world. In contrast, "August 2026" has no human characters nor human emotion in any character. This lack of humanity in the characters of "August 2026" directly impacts its ability to present a world where humanity has a loosening grip on the world, because humans have no grip at all in the story. Instead, robots have complete control of everything. The mice demonstrate this when, "[d]elicately sensing decay at last, the regiments of mice hummed out... [and t]he dog was gone." (2). This shows the difference between human and inhuman characters. The mice's insensitivity to the dog's death is completely inhuman and eliminates any connection the reader has to the characters of the story. A human would have treated the dog more respectfully, unlike the unceremonious treatment by the mice. The relationship with the reader established by "The Pedestrian" by having human characters is nonexistent in "August 2026" which decreases the effectiveness of "August 2026" at portraying the theme of humanity's ephemeral grip on the world in the future.

While the tone of "August 2026" remains neutral "The Pedestrian" has an anti-human tone that plays off its characters relatability to present the changing control of the world humanity has effectively. This choice of tone by Bradbury for "The Pedestrian" connects directly with how humans have an ephemeral grip on the world. This is demonstrated when Mr. Mead asks the police car where he is about to be unwillingly taken, to which the police replied, "To the

Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies” (2). The robot is taking Mr. Mead to a mental hospital for being essentially human. Mr. Mead wants to the walk for the sheer purpose of enjoying a stroll, yet this is considered wrong by the police. The actions the police take against Mr. Mead establish the anti-human tone present in “The Pedestrian”. This tone shows how humans have lost power, and robots are now the ones who order humans around. This is not accomplished as well in “August 2026,” because its tone is much more pro-human, relative to “The Pedestrian”. Robots that are built to serve mankind toil endlessly throughout “August 2026.” They purposefully work for the benefit of the non-existent humans whether it be by doing things humans like or maintaining their house. These actions create a relatively more pro-human tone in comparison to “The Pedestrian.” Such pro-human actions are clear when the story-telling robot is having its audience pick a poem for it to read. Humans are absent in this story, so the lack of response resulted in the robot to pick a poem that was “[a]s I recall, your favorite” (3). Here the robot elected to read a poem that a human liked deliberately. This action does not support the theme and may go as far as partially contradicting it. “The Pedestrian” did a much better job than “August 2026” at using its tone to present its theme in the passage.

Connections to modern day societal issues are a major advantage which “The Pedestrian” has over “August 2026” in presenting humanity’s weakening grip on the world. This relatability allows for a stronger connection between the reader and the theme to be conveyed more successfully. “The Pedestrian” strengthens this connection by talking about police brutality. The officer that Mr. Mead engages with during his last walk as a free man quickly escalates the situation by saying, “[h]ands up... or we’ll shoot” (1). All too familiar from the constant stream of news about it, the fact that many officers may be quick to pull a gun on innocent civilians is demonstrated effectively in “The Pedestrian”. The police officer acts the way that is

demonstrated by the media here, overreacting to a mild solution and turning violent. This major issue in today's society that is so well expressed in this dystopian society provides more points for the reader to connect. Other issues it addresses that are present in both societies include mental health, as Mr. Mead was being taken away to a mental hospital at the end of the passage. By talking about these issues, the modern reader is more able to relate to the story, allowing for the theme to be more easily presented. "August 2026" fails to do this, as it talks about the fear of a nuclear apocalypse through nuclear shadows: "[t]he five spots of paint-the man, the woman, the children, the ball- remained" (1). Here, Bradbury shows the overwhelming fear of a nuclear blast. Considering that today, there are no bomb drills, no educational videos detailing what to do in a blast show in our schools, nor any significant bomb survival program in place for the public, the threat of a nuke is much less relevant today than in the Cold War era when "August 2026" was written. This makes "August 2026" far less relatable. Relatability opens the new doors to presenting deeper meaning, so by talking about outdated issues, "August 2026" is unable present its theme as effectively as "The Pedestrian".

Development of human characters, an anti-human tone, and connections to modern societal issues all encouraged "The Pedestrian" to more effectively present its theme than "August 2026". Human characters encourage the readers to relate with the story, as did the modern issues being addressed. This relation made presenting the ephemeral grip that humanity has on the world be more direct. The anti-human tone of "The Pedestrian" supports the theme further, which was not accomplished by the neutral theme of "August 2026". Therefore, "The Pedestrian" is a more valuable and relevant story for the readers of today.